



IN SITU TALK #3

HOW TO TRANSFORM A SMALL CITY INTO A WHOLE THEATER?

BEHIND THE SCENES OF FIRATÀRREGA.

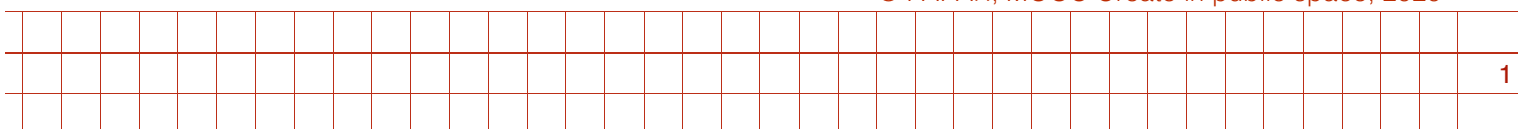
*A presentation and reflection upon the work of FiraTàrrega with its home city :
How to transform a small city into a whole theater ?
What for ? And how to proceed to make this happen ?*

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Summary of the session

- 1.- A brief introduction of FiraTàrrega
- 2.- The transformation of the city. How to move from the idea to the reality
- 3.- FiraTàrrega, the city and the citizens. A long-term relationship





1.- A brief introduction of FiraTàrrega

Historical background

In 1975 the dictatorship Franco dies. On April 19, 1979, the first democratic city councils were formed, as a result of the first municipal elections. This opened the way for democratic normalization in Spain and for the political structuring of Spanish society.

In 1980 the country had recovered democracy. The constitution of the first city councils was a celebration of freedom and democracy.

The Fira de Teatre al Carrer de Tàrrega was born in 1981 thanks to the initiative of the then Mayor of Tàrrega, Eugeni Nadal, and as the result of a confluence of ideas, that of converting the town's local festival into a grand fiesta; encouraging the people to take part and get involved and put the whole town to the service of a concrete project, in this case, for the theatre.

To carry out this project, Nadal had, from the outset, the complicity of Xavier Fàbregas, Head of Servei de Cinematografia i Teatre at the Generalitat de Catalunya and Joan Font, director of [Comediants](#).

In 1981

A series of factors contributed to getting this initial project of the ground:

- ✓ Politically, the restoration of democratic town councils after the first local elections, promoted the popular festivals and regained the street as a physical space for collective meetings and celebrations.
- ✓ In the cultural field, theatre companies and musical groups who reinforced this idea appeared in Catalonia. These include Comediants, founded in 1978, Vol Ras in 1980, La Vella Dixieland or El Tricicle. At the beginning of the 80s La Fura dels Baus, La Cubana, etc, also appeared.
- ✓ Geographically, Tàrrega is a town near the important urban centres but far enough away to mean staying there for a greater or lesser time.
- ✓ The calendar was also an element to keep in mind when organising la Fira. The fact that it coincided with the end of summer and the last weekend before the schools went back favoured the attendance.
- ✓ Finally, the medieval layout of the town allowed the organisers to concentrate the venues in the centre, which centralised the shows and bunched the audience together, making them into protagonists in the event.

The impact was immediate. Everybody understood that this was a unique event. It was like the big bang of the street arts of Catalonia.

In 2020

FiraTàrrega is one of the 6 strategic markets of Catalonia, under the umbrella of the brand Catalan Arts hosted by the Catalan Institute for Cultural Companies (ICEC). <http://www.catalanarts.cat/web/en>

FiraTàrrega is very active in national and international networks with the aim to advocate and support performing arts and, particularly, advocate for the creations in public space. Its is one of the founding events of COFAE, the Spanish Coordinator of Performing Arts Trade Fairs, <https://www.cofae.net/en/que-es-cofae.php>, and active member of Circostrada, the European Network for Circus and Street Arts <https://www.circostrada.org/en>

FiraTàrrega is the commercial brand of the Fira de Teatre al Carrer de Tàrrega, a local public business entity with its own board of directors, comprising the Tàrrega Town Hall, the Lleida Provincial Council, the Spanish Ministry of Culture and the Government of Catalonia. This fact is important to understand the role of the event as a public service for the city and the country.

[More info: History FiraTàrrega 1981 to 2019](#)



- Urban architecture (a balcony for an interactive performance or a big plane front wall for an aerial dance show)
- A natural emplacement for a landscape proposal or a site-sensitive.
- The precise street for a promenade show (wide, with no obstacles...)

All events in the public space must also be aware of light, wind, position of the sun (sunset/sunrise), noise pollution, health and safety, crowd control issues or the specific dynamics of the location.

The fascinating research of specific locations in the city

The site-specific or site-sensitive projects need locations related to the content of the show. When placing them we have to take in account how this content will relate to the space where it will be sited.

The location is a shared research between the team of Fira and the artistic companies, to respond this question: Which is the best place where to emplace your performance and which is the worst place where you as an artist would never perform your show?

Luckily, the relation between FiraTàrrrega and the community of Tàrrrega allows us to involve the city into this research, to make it happen. It means extra production. It increases the efforts but if done it with respect to all the parties it creates great artistic results.

Some examples of successful site specific performances seen in FiraTàrrrega, in the last 5 years:

[“Fugit”](#). Kamtchatka (2014)

[“Stellar moments of humanity”](#). Eléctrico 28 (2017)

[“Prácticas de vuelo para acabar con el olvido”](#). Chroma Teatre (2018) [“Paseos urbanos”](#). Itsaso

Iribarren & Germán de la Riva (2019)

The pieces of a jigsaw puzzle to be assembled

Between the close of the call and the launching of the programme there is a long 5- month period because the grid is a big puzzle that must be assembled as best as we can.

FiraTàrrrega receives circa 700 proposals and the final programme includes only 42. The selection starts with the ungrateful task for any programmer to say no to many very good proposals that, unfortunately, don't fit in the 25 venues used by the event (theatre, site-specific locations, big venues, small venues, all types of outdoor locations, etc...) . The second step is to ensemble the puzzle, taking into account locations, disciplines, gender, accessibility, time schedules, etc...

Key factors that the artistic and technical teams must consider during the selection of every proposal are: the dimension, the scale, the location (indoor or outdoors) and the technical requirements.

The balance of the programme is important, too:

- ✓ Origin of the proposals:
 - 50% Catalonia
(As strategic market of Catalan Arts)
 - 25% rest of Spain
(In accordance of our agreement with the [National Stage Arts and Music Institute \(INAEM\)](#) and several Autonomous Communities that trust in Fira as their international hub.)
 - 25% international
(Some as a result of artistic partnerships with festivals, agencies or networks)
- ✓ Premiers: between 35% to 40% of the programme
- ✓ Balance outdoor/indoor: 60% outdoor and in non-conventional venue / 40% indoor conventional venues



The programme grid is the most delicate moment

Once the initial selection of companies is completed (done between December and March) the artistic team and the technical department work hand in hand to put together the grid (between April and May) as, among many issues, the schedule must consider artistic requirements and strategic decisions such as:

- Maximum number of performances per day every show can deliver
- To match the size of the shows with the size of the venues
- Timings of setting up and dismantling
- The noise pollution between nearby venues
- To place and use music promenade shows to gather and move audiences around
- Locate in the same venue companies that can share technical equipment
- Weather conditions (squares too exposed to sun or areas affected by high winds...)
- The safety conditions of each venue

3.- FiraTàrrega, the city and the citizens. A long-term relationship

FiraTàrrega is the festival of the city. The event is organized by a full-time team of 7 people (that enlarges up to 250 workers during the 4-day event in September). In addition the other departments of the city council work closely with the team of Fira.

Among them, the key commitment comes from the municipal brigade. This is the collective of workers in charge of the maintenance of infrastructures, the gardening service, arrangement and cleaning, small repairs, assistance to different associations, the assembly and disassembly of festive and cultural events that are organized in the town. Their enthusiast and tireless work before and during the event is essential to make the miracle possible.

The relation between the event and the citizens

The feature that all newcomers to the festival highlight is the positive energy and involvement of the citizens and audiences with the event.

This has been a relationship that has evolved in time among the different generations that lived FiraTàrrega (Generation X, the Millennials, Generation Y and the current so-called Igen), but some clues of this evolution are:

FiraTàrrega is the great audience meeting of the city and it provokes an important economic impact. See this study from 2012 [global economic impact generated by firatarrega 2011 2012](#)

It has also provoked a social and emotional impact to citizens. The cliché that the event has put the city on the map is relevant. The transformation caused by Fira has changed the annual calendar of many activities from the 1st January to 31st December to another that goes from Monday after Fira to Thursday next year just before inauguration.

Nevertheless the relation of citizens and the event could be divided in 3 major groups: the "lovers", the "haters" and the big mass in-between. And the event has to deal and manage this relationship, which is a challenge and an opportunity to experiment actions.



How do we link citizens and the event?

The most effective and gratifying way has been through the artistic programme

Involving local actors, extras and volunteers in community creations
([Urgent Estimar](#), [Diez de cada Diez](#) or [Mst of all, you've got to hide it from the chicks](#) among many!)

Support for Creation, which opens the residency programme to the audiences with public rehearsals and activities throughout the year. These actions bring together the creators and the local audience during the creation processes, allowing the artists to experiment with real audience and the citizens to experience the show during its creation.

More info: https://www.firatarrega.cat/suport-creacio/en_index

In 2020 Fira opens a new strand to relate citizens and the event: The Expanded Programme. A series of activities around the topics of the selected projects, such as tradition, memory, networks or artificial intelligence.

Other links outside of the artistic experience (sometimes unexpected) are:

- ✓ Involving people in the organization, as staff (ticketing, information...)
- ✓ Requesting collaboration to the citizens and rewarding them with tickets and vip engaging with the event: using houses as performing venues, requesting personal clothing or props..
- ✓ Opening contests and calls to be part of experiments, like the image of 2017 about "[citizenship](#)" with the participation of 3 local villagers.

The ultimate goal is to maximize the participation of the villagers and their sense of ownership over the event. As long as we make the citizens not only spectators but active participants of what we do the future will look bright, even in the darkest times.

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